

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative, how it promotes high student achievement and how it can be replicated.

“Walk in my Shoes” serves as an educational opportunity which challenges young people to further their awareness and appreciation of their personal abilities and fosters an understanding of and sensitivity towards individuals who face the daily challenges of disability. This practice provides a hands-on experiential approach to learning about disabilities and personal challenges. A “Walk in my Shoes” is an experience which can change the way students (and society) perceives, responds to and understands disability as it presents an opportunity for growth, reflection, appreciation and understanding of who you are as a person and how you face challenges. The workshop provides a non-threatening, collaborative and cooperative experience of disability wherein each student must face and explore a personal challenge.

Students are “challenged” within a classroom environment to experience various forms of disabilities as they are presented at stations located within the classroom. Desks are grouped into six stations of four desks (number can vary according to size). Each station represents a different form of disability. Students are paired and two pairs travel together from station to station (four students per station). At all times during the workshop, one student is the guide-student and the other student is the “challenged” student. Partners will take turns experiencing the activities but students must understand that one student is completely free of any burden or distraction while the other student is participating. This workshop can be conducted within 2 to 3 forty-five minute classes or within 1 to 2 ninety-minute classes. Groups of four will rotate (clockwise or counter-clockwise works well) from station to station approximately every eight minutes. Timing can be called by the teacher or designated by a timer. Before a student group leaves the station the “challenged” students must record their experience, thoughts, feelings, question, etc. in the response journal for that station. Each station has a journal. Guide students are also encouraged to record their observations. Setup takes approximately five to ten minutes (with materials pre-prepared) and you should expect to leave at least fifteen minutes for workshop closure/discussion. **Station 1: Blindness.** Students wearing blindfolds try to identify objects in a “bag of scents” (by touch and scent). Students attempt to identify objects in “black box,” a closed box with objects inside and a hole in one side with a sock attached to the side so the students’ hands can explore the contents within the box. **Station 2: Multiple handicaps: blindness, restricted use of hands, restricted use of fingers.** Using tape and glove for restriction, students must perform such tasks as pouring water from a container to a cup, opening a pack of gum, picking up bingo chips from the floor. **Station 3: Deaf/Mute.** Students are “challenged” to perform a series of communication tasks using sign language (alphabets can be provided, if necessary). Random individuals can be asked to approach the group with questions to see how students respond to spontaneous situations. **Station 4: Visually Impaired/Perceptually Impaired:** students must trace basic pictures/shapes, using mirrors to alter perception. Students try to navigate classroom (with guide-partner) wearing glasses thickly coated with translucent cream (i.e., glaucoma, vision impairment). Students are asked to thread a needle with gardener’s gloves on and to read aloud to their partner a paragraph written with numerous letter and symbol reversals (i.e., dyslexia, etc.). **Station 5: Multiple handicap/Fine Motor.** Students are asked to “read” Braille messages while blindfolded and to identify signs with raised symbols (Braille alphabet can be provided, if necessary). “Challenged” students, having the use of only two fingers and then no fingers, must try to open a combination lock, place stickers on a paper, make a paper airplane, put hair in a ponytail and put on stick-on earrings. **Station 6: Gross-Motor Handicaps:** Students negotiate classroom (and hallway, if applicable) using a wheelchair, crutches and a walker. Students should attempt to open a window, write on the board, sharpen a pencil, retrieve a book from their locker (if applicable), get a drink and locate a functional exit. These activities can be set up with basic materials. The specialty materials can be borrowed from local community centers. Community members were thrilled to learn we were doing such an activity!

“Walk in my Shoes” promotes awareness and understanding of disability as a term, a label and a definition used in society to categorize, explain and describe individuals. It fosters an appreciation of sensory development and the ability to perceive and understand our world through our senses and establishes a basis for learning about and exploring gross-motor and fine-motor functions. This practice encourages students to accept challenge with determination and perceive themselves and others as “able,” regardless of the “label” society may place upon them.

2. Describe the Educational needs of students that the practice addresses and how they were identified. List the Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses the standard(s).

Created as a component of a “Challenges” Unit developed to recognize and understand the many challenges people face in life, a “Walk in my Shoes” puts theory into practice utilizing cooperative-learning, student partnerships, communication skills, perspective, learning styles, creativity, sensitivity and focus on students as individuals. As students learn and grow during their school years they begin to explore who they are and who they will become through the choices they make, the groups they form and the experiences they share. It is during this critical period that the young person’s character begins to set as he/she encounters life experiences. “A Walk in my Shoes” provides an opportunity for personal growth and character development that can leave a lasting impression upon one’s understanding of self and other.

The Core-Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards addressed by the “Walk in my Shoes” practice are as follows: **Language Arts/Literacy:** *students read a variety of materials and texts with comprehension and critical analysis.* Students read, Helen Keller: The Story of My Life. Chapter discussions of her story, vocabulary enrichment and written/verbal responses reflected understanding and comprehension of lessons conveyed through the language and expressions within the text. Other texts used included: Listening with my Heart (Heather Whitestone), Blind Sunday (Jessica Evans), excerpts from Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul (Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Kimberly Kirberger), various magazine articles and shared experiences. *Students practice effective communication skills and write to express feelings, ideas, opinions and share information for self and for audience:* speech and written language were incorporated in both “A Walk in my Shoes” and culminating school project presentations, classroom discussions, journal written responses and personal essays. *Students will view/use non-textual visual information:* the Braille alphabet, sign language and the film *The Miracle Worker*. **Social Studies:** *Students will acquire an understanding of varying cultures throughout the world:* the “experience” of the culture of individuals with disabilities included an historical understanding of the laws and societal ideas which include stereotypes, prejudices, citizenship and responsibility. **Science:** *students gain an understanding of the structure/function of their five senses and the principles of gross-motor and fine-motor movement and coordination. Students enhance their understanding of how we come to know and understand ourselves and the world around us through our sensory perception.* **Math:** *students utilize problem-solving techniques, critical thinking skills, and spatial judgment of dimensions to navigate around areas and to perform station tasks.* **Health:** *students will explore, research and share information regarding various human conditions, disabilities, diseases such as blindness, deafness, speech disorders, dyslexia, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida, downs syndrome and other injury-related disabilities.* **World Languages:** *students will acquire basic practice of language as a “connection” to other cultures.* Sign language and the Braille alphabet exist as lifelines between the impaired and the non-impaired cultures. **Visual/Performing Arts:** *activities and discussions presented serve to enhance students’ awareness of and appreciation for color, light, shadow, balance, detail, design, rhythm and sound.* **Cross-Content Workplace Readiness:** *Students are “challenged” to apply critical thinking skills, problem solving techniques, decision making strategies, self-management/safety considerations and awareness of others.* These are incorporated into the cooperative learning model which promotes partnerships and fosters an interdependent relationship of trust and accountability between guide student and challenged student.

Each of the experiences and the many dimensions of the workshop supports and promotes the development of character in the participants through determination, positive attitude, perseverance, support and community.

3. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met.

As an interdisciplinary practice, the “Walk in my Shoes” experience presents the opportunity to apply a variety of assessment measures to determine the evaluation of proposed objectives. The assessment measures include the following activities and processes, detailed accordingly. **Directed discussion** of each station experience followed the “Walk in my Shoes” workshop. These discussions were conducted both in

full class and in small group settings with students responding to and asking questions of other classmates and group members. *Guide-student and Challenged-student partner- shares* allowed students to discuss the station experiences with their partners and review what each person wrote in the station response journal along with the responses of others who participated in the activity.

Communication Skills are another component of this process which served as an additional resource and educational tool for students. The students were taught both the sign language alphabet and the Braille alphabet. Skill drills and practice of each allowed students to be able to sign and understand words and some phrases. Sign language workshops were primarily conducted in a small-group setting where the class was working on their projects and students took turns during sessions. Sign language and Braille charts, etc., were posted in the room for accessibility and self-practice. Students were able to sign and understand words (sign language spelling tests and Braille message translations were given). Students appeared to truly enjoy these alternative forms of communication and to develop an interest in their new languages.

The Culminating Project for the “Walk in my Shoes” practice and Challenges Curriculum was the Creation and Presentation of a School for the Blind, the Deaf and the Mute Populations. Students formed research groups based upon the original sensory awareness activity which invited students to prioritize their senses in order of importance to them. Three research groups were formed (approximately eight students per group). Group one was assigned the disability of being blind, group two being deaf and group three being mute. There were five basic components to the project. *First*, students were required to research both existing facilities and programs which aid or assist their population. *Second*, students researched individuals who faced such a challenge. *Third*, students discovered and discussed how laws such as the *Americans with Disabilities Act* apply to and affect their population (rulings, court cases, etc.). *Fourth*, students combined the information they found and the experience they learned to create a curriculum proposal that listed and explained what would be taught and how subjects would be taught (i.e. how to teach music in a school for the deaf). The school proposal also included a listing of faculty/staff requirements (i.e., teachers, therapists, etc.), advertisements for and a blueprint of the school. All groups were directed to assume that their facility had to be accessible to a multiple handicap population, also, and to consider space and building constraints. *Fifth*, students were required to present their project to the class as if the class was a community of parents, educators, business leaders, government officials and students. Within this forum, once the presentations were made, the “community” could challenge or question the “school officials” on the various components of their proposal. Discussion of each presentation followed.

A Rubric was used to assess each presentation which was shared with the class from the beginning of the project so that they could monitor their own project. Group and individual assessments were made of the culminating School project as there were both individual components and cooperative components existing within the assignment. With varying degrees of assistance and direction, each group assigned a pair of students to conduct each component and to share and discuss the findings with the group so that they could build the fifth presentation component together. The groups were assisted with creating a schedule for completing tasks and used a combination of class and independent work-time to complete the project.

The students who experienced a “Walk in my Shoes” further demonstrated their understanding of and growth within this experience by then serving as facilitators of the practice for other classes to experience. Their excitement for and knowledge of the practice became the greatest testimony to its value and significance in their learning.

“Walk in my Shoes” is more than an educational practice – it is a window into a world that most individuals may otherwise never see or experience. Peering through this window, even for just a moment, allows students to perhaps see their world through different eyes - some for the very first time. It is an experience which demonstrates that once you have “walked” in the shoes of another, you will never walk the same way again.

As an interactive and cooperative experience, “Walk in my Shoes” provides the opportunity for students to learn how to care about and accept others for their similarities, differences, abilities and disabilities. It focuses on understanding, overcoming obstacles and most of all facing challenges with determination and strength. The dynamics of this process foster an educational environment based upon cooperation rather than competition, where trying is just as important and just as appreciated as succeeding. It challenges not only the senses but also one’s sense of self. A “Walk in my Shoes” is an inclusive educational practice which teaches a life practice: how to be human.